

5 secrets to raise kind-hearted kids



From our guest contributor, Michele Borba

Research tells us empathy is a trait we can develop in our kids. Here are a few simple secrets to help your child learn to feel for the views of others, develop a strong, caring mindset.

1. Point Out Other People's Feelings

Point out the facial expressions, posture and mannerisms of people in different emotional states as well as their predicaments is beneficial: it helps your child tune into other people's feelings. As occasions arise, explain your concern and what clues helped you make your feeling assessment: "Did you notice Sally's face when you were playing today? I was concerned because she seemed worried about something. Maybe you should talk to her to see if she's okay."

2. Switch Roles to Feel The Other Side

Michael was a special education student of mine who had difficulty understanding anyone else's feelings but his own. One day he hurt another student's feelings with his teasing, but I just couldn't get him to understand how sad he'd made the other child. I spotted a wire hanger on the floor, quickly bent it into a large circle shape and improvised:

"Michael, stick your head through the hole and pretend you're Stevie and feel just like Stevie feels. I'll be Michael. 'I started the role play: Stevie, your haircut makes you look dumb.' How do you feel, Stevie?"

By making Michael switch places and pretend to be Stevie he finally understood Stevie's hurt. I used a wire hanger as a prop for Michael to use in role playing the other child's point of view.

- You can help your young child act out the other person's perspective using puppets, dolls, or even toy action figures. As kids get older you can just ask, "Switch places and take the other person's side. How would you feel if you were in her place?"

3. Imagine Someone's Feelings

One way to help your child connect with the feelings of others is to have her imagine how the other person feels about a special situation. Suppose your child just wrote a get well card to her Grandma. Use the moment to help her recognize her grandmother's reaction when she receives the card by pretending she's the other person. "Imagine you're Grandma right now. You walk to the mailbox, and when you open it you find this letter. How will you feel?"

You later can expand the imagination game to include people your child has not personally met: "Imagine you're a new student and you're walking into a brand new school and don't know anyone. How will you feel?"

- Asking often, “How would you feel?” helps kids understand the feelings and needs of other people.

4. Be the Example You Want Your Kid To Become

Kids don’t learn to be caring, kind and compassionate just by us telling them about it. They learn it best through our own example. Every week or so, you might stop and ask yourself, “What deeds have I done this week that show my kids I value caring? How am I helping my child become kind-hearted?

- Opportunities are endless: take a batch of cookies to the new neighbor, deliver old toys to the fire department that can be distributed to needy children, coach a sport to a group of kids, be a room parent in a classroom, bring a bowl of soup or a ready-made dinner to a sick friend, or make or purchase a baby blanket to bring to a family shelter. *And always ask your child to accompany you on your missions of caring.*

Helping a child recognize the impact of kindness is a fabulous way to convey to our kids that caring is important to us and can make our world a better place.

5. Use Moral Discipline

Martin Hoffman, a world-renown researcher from the University of Michigan, aimed one of his most influential studies on empathetic children. He wanted to determine the type of discipline their parents most frequently used with their children, and the finding was clear.

- The most common discipline technique parents of highly considerate children use is reasoning with them about their uncaring behavior.

Their parents’ reasoning lessons helped sensitize their children to the feelings of others, and realize how their actions may affect others. It’s an important parenting point to keep in mind in those moments when we confront our own kids

for any uncaring deed.



Dr. Michele Borba is an educational psychologist, parenting expert, TODAY show contributor and author of 22 books including *The Big Book of Parenting Solutions: 101 Answers to Your Everyday Challenges and Wildest Worries* and *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World*.

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